Moscow State University

Nature in life of the Brits and the Russians

Final Project

Written by Valkova Ekaterina

Approved by Alla L. Nazarenko

Moscow

2017

Content

1.Nature in life of the Brits

1.1 The love of nature

1.2 The National Trust

# 1.3 Park life: the wildlife of Britain's cities

2. Russian nature and wildlife

2.1 Vast nature

2.2 Dacha

2.3 Country living in Russia

References

Photo illustrations

1. Nature in life of the Brits

1.1 The love of nature

Most of the British live in towns and cities. But they have an idealized vision of the countryside . To the British, the countryside has almost none of the negative associations which it has in some countries, such as poor facilities, lack of educational opportunities. Unemployment and poverty. To them, the countryside means peace and quiet, beauty, good health and no crime. Most of them would live in a country village if they thought that they could find a way of earning a living the re. Ideally, this village would consist of thatched cottages (see chapter I 9) built around an area of grass known as a 'village green' . Nearby, there would be a pond with ducks on it. Nowadays such a village is not actually very common, but it is a stereotypical picture that is well-known to the British. Some history connected with the building of the Channel tunnel (see chapter 17) provides an instructive example of the British attitude. While the 'chunnel ' was being built, there were also plans to build new high-speed rail links on either side of it. But what route would these new railway lines take? On the French side of the channel, communities battled with each other to get the new line built through their towns. It would be good for local business. But on the English side, the opposite occurred. Nobody wanted the rail link ne r them! Communities battled with each other to get the new line built somewhere else. Never mind about business, they wanted 1O preserve their peace and quiet. Perhaps this love of the countryside is another aspect of British conservatism. The countryside represents stability. Those who live in towns and cities take an active interest in country matter s and the British regard it as both a right and a privilege to be able to go 'into the country' whenever they want to. Large area s of the country are official ' national parks' where almost no building is allowed. There is an organization to which thousands of enthusiastic country walkers belong, the Ramblers' Association. It is in constant battle with landowners to keep open the public 'rights of way' across their lands. Maps can be bought which mark, in great detail, the routes of all the public footpath s in the country. Walkers often stay at youth hostels. The Youth Hostels Association is a charity whose aim is 'to help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside '. Their hostels are cheap and rather self-consciously bare and simple. There are more than 300 of them around the country, most of them in the middle of nowhere! Even if they cannot get in to the countryside, many British people still spend a lot o f their time with 'nature' . They grow plants. Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies in the country. Even those unlucky people who do not have a garden can participate. Each local authority owns several areas of land which it rents very cheaply to these people in small parcels. On these' allotments', people grow mainly vegetables.

1.2 The National Trust

A notable indication of the British reverence for both the countryside and the past is the strength of the National Trust. This is an officially recognized charity whose aim is to preserve as much of Britain’s countryside and as many of its historic buildings as possible by acquiring them ' for the nation'. It was founded in 1985 by three people who saw the importance of nation’s heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy.  More than 120 years later, these values are still at the heart of everything they do. They look after special places throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland forever, for everyone.

With more than one-and-a-half million members, it is the largest conservation organization in the world. It is actually the third largest landowner in Britain (after the Crown and the Forestry Commission). It owns more than 500 miles of the coastline. The importance of its work has been supported by several laws, among which is one which does not allow even the government to take over any of its land without the approval of Parliament.

 It’s launched an ambitious plan to nurse the natural environment back to health and reverse the alarming decline in wildlife. Its strategy for the next decade will also see us invest in looking after the nation’s heritage.

The countryside had been damaged by decades of unsustainable land management, which has seen intensive farming and now climate change undermine the long-term health of the land. Sixty per cent of species have declined in the UK over the last 50 years, habitats have been destroyed and over-worked soils have been washed out to sea.

It’ll develop new, innovative ways of managing land on a large scale, which are good for farmers, the economy and the environment. It’ll work with partners to help look after some of the country’s most important landscapes, reconnecting habitats and bringing back their natural beauty.

‘The protection of natural environment and historic places over the past 100 years has been core to the work of the Trust but it has never been just about looking after our own places,’ says Helen Ghosh, National Trust’s Director General. ‘This is a long-term commitment, for the benefit of generations to come.’‘Our strategy will see us working more collaboratively with a range of partners - we will support where we can and lead where we should,’ adds our Chairman Tim Parker. ‘The National Trust has always responded to the challenges of the time. I believe our founders would be proud of our ambitions and the part we plan to play.’

# 1.3 Park life: the wildlife of Britain's cities

Far from destroying the British love of nature, Britain cities have become urban oases for wildlife

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the British are more obsessed with nature and wildlife than any other nation on earth. Television programmes such as Springwatch have legions of loyal fans; the RSPB has more than one million members, while almost as many have joined their local wildlife trust; two out of three of British feed birds in their gardens.

And yet this national passion for wildlife is a very modern phenomenon. Its origins lie in a major change that occurred in British society around two centuries ago: the shift from a mainly rural society to a predominantly urban one, a change that at the time threatened to destroytheir passion for nature altogether.

Until 1800, as many as three in four Britons lived in the countryside. A lucky few were rich landowners, living a life of leisure, but the vast majority were poor, and spent most of their waking hours working the land. If they thought about wildlife at all, it was probably with a very practical approach: was a particular creature dangerous, or simply good to eat? They certainly had little time for the appreciation of nature we take for granted today.

The industrial revolution changed the relationship with the natural world forever. Within a couple of generations, the ancestors moved lock, stock and barrel from the countryside into towns and cities. By the end of the 19th century, almost four out of five Britons lived in urban areas.

But they didn't forget their rural heritage. Indeed, Victorian Britons soon began to hanker after the life they had left behind. Excursions into the countryside, first by railway and later by road, became a regular part of people's lives. Societies such as the London Natural History Society, founded in 1858, and the West of Scotland Ramblers' Alliance, created in 1892, were formed to enable men and women to enjoy days out in the hills, woods and fields of rural Britain. By the beginning of the 20th century, an increase in mobility and leisure time saw a surge of interest in outdoor hobbies such as rambling and birdwatching; pastimes that would see an even more rapid growth after the second world war.

Yet, for many people, the occasional visit to the countryside was not enough; they also wanted to bring nature into their daily lives. Town and city parks were created, where on summer evenings and weekends they could enjoy a breath of fresh air in a green space. Later, towards the end of the 19th century and during the early years of the 20th, the demand for private green spaces created a growing network of urban gardens. As time went on and Britons became more prosperous, they sought to attract wildlife to those gardens by providing food, water, and places to nest. In doing so, urban dwellers were creating a vital refuge for the wildlife itself.

The need to be self-sufficient in food in the years during and immediately after the second world war led to the destruction of many of their most valuable natural habitats. Millions of acres of ancient hedgerows and hay meadows, fens and marshes were ploughed up, drained and destroyed.

Even when food rationing came to an end in the early 1950s, and self-sufficiency was no longer quite so crucial, the destruction of the countryside continued. The rise of chemical farming, driven by a demand by consumers for cheap food at any cost, led to vast swathes of lowland Britain turning into little more than a food factory. During this same post-war period, the rapid rise in Britain's population fuelled a demand for more houses and roads. This provided a vital boost for the economy, but often proved disastrous for Britain's wildlife.

By the closing decades of the 20th century the countryside of our grandparents' childhood had, to all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. In its place was a green desert: clean, efficient, yet in places almost totally devoid of wildlife.

The consequences for their rural plants and animals have been devastating. Bumblebees and butterflies, cuckoos and cornflowers, skylarks and lapwings – every one an icon of our natural heritage – are all in rapid, and in some cases perhaps terminal, decline.

And yet this dark cloud does have one silver lining: the rise of what nature writer Richard Mabey has memorably called the "unofficial countryside" – Britain's roadside verges and railway cuttings, canal towpaths and brownfield sites. This also includes the million or so acres of private gardens – an area around the size of Suffolk, and bigger than all the nature reserves in Britain put together.

These places – many of them in the heart of our towns and cities – provide a vital oasis for Britain's wild creatures, a haven as important as anywhere in the British Isles for supporting a diverse range of plants and animals. Perhaps because of the wide range of wildlife found in their urban areas, and the frequency with which they encounter these city creatures, urban Britons are just as connected to nature as – arguably sometimes more so than – their rural neighbours. The countryside and those who live there no longer have a monopoly on nature.

So, even as they have witnessed the wholesale destruction of some of their most precious habitats and their wildlife, their passion for nature has thrived and developed into something that now defines them as a nation. This has its roots in the events of two centuries ago, when the ancestors were wrenched away from life on the land, and herded together into cities. Far from losing their passion for nature, the city dwellers need it more than ever.

Two hundred years after the greatest change in British society, landscape and nature began, Britons and the wildlife are together again. Yet this is not in some bucolic, rural idyll, but in the heart of their biggest and busiest cities. These are the places where Britain's wild creatures can still be seen, loved and appreciated in all their beauty, diversity and wonder.

1. Russian nature and wildlife

2.1 Vast nature

The sheer size of Russia means that it hosts a vast array of nature and wildlife.  The country is home to various landscapes and almost every habitat imaginable including mountains, rivers, seas, Arctic tundra and more.  Russia contains the largest expanse of forest in the world with some 8 million square kilometres of mixed woodlands.  The Russian Far East is particularly known for its nature and wildlife and is considered a biodiversity hotspot.  Within this part of the country, over 3,000 vascular plants exist as well as a mixture of animals from both Southern [Asia](https://www.goway.com/trips/dest/asia/) and the boreal north.

Within this expansive country, there are approximately 266 mammal species.  Of these species, 26 are listed as vulnerable, a further 13 are endangered while 5 are considered critically endangered.  These endangered species include the Siberian tiger, the far eastern leopard and the snow leopard.  Other animals found in Russia include the lynx, the Asiatic black bear, the brown bear, musk deer and more.  As well as mammals, there are approximately 780 bird species that have been recorded in Russia.

In order to protect the wildlife of the country, there are 101 strictly protected areas as well as 41 national parks.  Altogether, these national parks cover approximately 71,700 square kilometres (27,700 square miles).  The Barguzinsky Biosphere Reserve is the oldest reserve in Russia.  It was established in 1916 to preserve the numbers of Barguzin Sable which was (and remains) popular for its unique fur which retains its smoothness in every direction when touched.  In 1986 it became a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and hosts over 874 plant species.  It is also home to nearly 40 mammal species including elks, musk deer, brown bears and more.

Vodlozersky National Park, located in northern Russia, was established in 1991.  At that time, it was the second largest national park in [Europe](https://www.goway.com/trips/dest/europe/).  There are two parts to the park that have different climates.  The southern part of the park surrounds Lake Vodlozero and has a more mild climate while the northern part is found in the river valley of Ileksa and experiences long and cold winters.  In 2001, Vodlozersky National Park was granted the status of a UNESCO Biosphere.  The area is known for its birdwatching opportunities and fishing while the Ileksa River and the Vodla River are popular amongst whitewater rafting enthusiasts.

Zabaikalsky National Park is located in the Buryatia Republic of eastern Russia.  The park was established to protect part of the western slopes of the Barguzin mountains as well as the Baikal watershed.  A variety of wildlife inhabits the park including endemic Baikal seals that live in the waters of Lake Baikal.  This park is included in the overall Lake Baikal UNESCO World Heritage Site.  Lake Baikal is the deepest lake in the world and makes up approximately 20% of all fresh running water on the planet.  It has earned the nickname of the “Galapagos of Russia” because it developed in isolation producing an incredibly unique freshwater ecosystem.  These parks are only a sampling of the vast nature and wildlife that is available within Russia.

Russia contains the planet's largest expanse of forest, over eight million square kilometres of mixed woodlands that are home to rare carnivores such as tigers, bears and leopards. The rest of Russia ranges from semi-desert to cold tundra, from snowy mountain peaks to open grasslands. The Himalayas and other mountain ranges have cut Russia off from the warmer southern climes, leaving most of the country temperate to subarctic and snowbound in winter, though the summers can be surprisingly hot. Russia's easternmost parts are the most biodiverse, though they also experience the harshest winters.

* 1. Dacha

The word “dacha” comes from a verb – “dat'” – to give and the noun “dar” – gift. Since many years, receiving a plot of land for personal usage was a great and very much appreciated gift – whether it came from Tsar government or Soviet government. But the way people used that land did differ much in different times. One cannot fully understand Russia without understanding the cultural context behind Russian dacha.

In the 90s was finally allowed to own property. That is another big and interesting story, but the outcome was that people started to buy dachas if they had money. Or, if they already had dachas, they could privatize them, officially making them the owned properties. Restrictions on the size of the land or number of floors in the house were also lifted. Finally, you could do whatever you want at your own land.

People, who were always deprived of such array of choices started to experiment. Rich “New Russians” immediately started to build huge mansions at their small plots of land. A lot of these houses lacked taste or style. Generations of local people had not seen beautiful country houses and commercial industry in this area was not developed yet. Tradition of building wooden houses was replaced by building brick or stone ones. Dachas used to be just summer houses, but now many people started to build all year round houses.

Now, finally, the industry works as well as in any other country and if you want to build a beautiful house of any style – it will be built for you. But it will be pricey. As with any commercial goods and services in Russia – from clothes to manicures, you pay premium for good stuff!

Many typical dachas still have more land devoted to growing produce than to the rest area

So, how do people spend time at dachas now? That does vary. A lot of people still work all day, growing potatoes, cucumbers, strawberries etc. The majority of these people have full-time jobs in the city, they are not agricultural workers, but every Friday evening they leave the city to have a weekend of really hard work in the field. Needless to say – they have to cope with [huge traffic jams](https://understandrussia.com/traffic-jams/) on the way to dacha and back in the big cities. Sometimes getting to a dacha which is 50-100 km from the city can take 3-4 hours. It is not possible to give a rational explanation of why they still continue growing potatoes, although they can easily buy them in any store. Economically it does not make sense, but people are irrational. For some growing produce is a habit, some (mostly older people) enjoy to cultivate land with their own hands, some like the idea of organic produce or say that potatoes, grown in your own garden just taste better.

Another phenomena, which some locals call [“Balcony, dacha, garbage can](https://understandrussia.com/balcony-country-house-garbage-can/)“. It is a story of frugality, caused by deficit of things in stores during Soviet times and scarcity of storage areas in urban apartments. Russians do not like to throw things away,even if they do not need some things – they still keep them. This stuff first lands at the balcony, then moves to dacha and only if it is really old or completely broken, ends up in garbage. As a result of that, a lot of people wear old clothes at dacha. And the majority have stacks of old clothes at dachas even though there is no shortage of clothes in store any more.

Still, many people do think of dacha as place to have fun. These people mow their lawns and plant flowers, so they still have to do their share of field work to make their dacha look presentable. But instead of spending all time in the garden, they invite friends and entertain them, grill meat, eat strawberries sitting in gazebos, play sports and enjoy other recreational activities. Hopefully this will become a mass trend and more people will enjoy resting at dacha rather than working there!

* 1. Country living in Russia

It is not a secret that there are many villages in Russia because it is the huge country and it is unreal to have a megapolis or at least a city in every region. A lot of Russians live in the countryside. It is a vast nation replete with a variety of landscapes and climates. But one uniquely Russian fixture is the birch tree, which is often personified in poetry as a lonely maiden on a hill longing for her love. Another is the steppe, a grassland plain that stretches endlessly toward an illusory horizon.

The cities have more exhaust fumes, crime and underground moves such sale of drugs etc. Also, there is a saturated social life, which not everyone likes. Finally, cities have the higher level of noise comparing with the countrysides. That is why sometimes people prefer not to live in towns.

The Russian countryside is a very specific thing. This term contains many things which are combined together. First of all, the culture. The statistics say that village people follow the traditions more often than people who live in cities. Secondly, as a rule, the Russian countryside consists of friendly atmosphere. It is difficult to find a person who will not help you if you ask him or her for it. It is also a place of pastoral beauty, sensory wonder and simple, old-fashioned joys.

After the XIX century, people all over the world try to move from countrysides to cities and find there a good accommodation and salary. But, do not forget that Russians are different. They have strong morals, so money do not stay at the first place for them. That is why migration from countrysides is not so developed in Russia. But now the situation is a little changed.

However, the main thing which belongs to all countrysides despite the country is the fact that the majority of people work for themselves. They plant vegetables and graze cattle. But there are some differences between Russian countryside and other countrysides.

**The Izba.** The traditional Russian country house is a little log cabin with colorful wood carvings on the windows. For anyone who grew up with a Russian mother, these windows have a magical quality, since Russian fairytales often begin with a kind-faced older woman opening one of these windows before tellng her story. The izba has a very distinct smell, of smoked pine wood and unpasteurized milk, and in the summer the rays of the sun heat the whole house so that when you lie on the floor or the porch it emanates a steady, quiet warmth.

**The Hearth.** The focal point of every izba is the pechka, which functions as both an oven and a fireplace. Built from brick, it is designed to retain heat for long periods of time, and is therefore the heartbeat of the household. Baked items like pierogies (knishes) are thought to acquire a distinctly delicious flavor as they cook, the dough flushing with increasingly darker shades of brown. Because of its steady warmth and chaise-like design, the top is also a very popular place to sleep in the wintertime—that is, if you can persuade the cat to leave. At the present time pechka is very seldom can be found.

**The interior.** One of the great things about Russian villages is that everyone has the same minimalistic, dark wooden furniture and old, peeling wallpaper, so every izba looks and feels like home. They often also have the same lace curtains that bathe the room in a soft, amber glow.

**The banya.** Indoor plumbing is a rarity in the countryside, so people relieve

themselves in outhouses and bathe themselves in separate heated huts known

as banyas. It's customary to get really sweaty and whip one another with a venik—a sort of Russian loofah composed of dried leaves tied together—to exfoliate the skin and get the blood circulation going, then jump into the snow afterwards. The banya also has a very distinct smell, of hot oak and birch leaves.

**The "retail."** Most of these villages only have one shop in the town center which carries basic food products, so any clothing or medicine shopping needs to be done in the market of a nearby city. It's not that much of an issue, since the agriculture is rich and people grow and make everything themselves and then sell it at the "bazaar" (local farmer's market).

**The Mushrooms.** The average Russian country dweller can rattle off the names of hundreds of types of mushrooms, and mushroom-hunting is another beloved family tradition. There is no greater victory than coming home with two woven baskets filled to the brim with these elusive vegetables.

**The Soups.** The country diet is very heavy on soups, particularly national favorites like Borscht (cabbage and beet) and Solynka (whatever is left in your fridge that is still edible). A light summer favorite is Okroshka, a cold soup made from Kvas (a rye-based beverage), and raw vegetables.

**The churches.** The Russian countryside is speckled with colorful cupolas and gleaming onion domes, imbuing every onlooker, regardless of their faith, with a sense spiritual wonder.

**The ruins.** Because faith has always been so integral to provincial life, the anti-religion crusade of the Bolsheviks was never really successful, unlike their quest to demolish of hundreds of famous cathedrals all over the country. While tragic, the ruins of these churches exude a mystical romance and haunting beauty that can be stunning to behold.

References

1. James O’Driscoll Britain. The country and its people: the introduction for learners of English.
2. <http://about-britain.com/tourism/english-countryside.htm>
3. <http://webecoist.momtastic.com/2012/05/25/12-mysterious-and-dramatic-natural-wonders-of-russia/>
4. <http://www.countryliving.com/life/a246/country-living-in-russia/>
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/may/19/wildlife-british-cities-stephen-moss>
6. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>
7. https://understandrussia.com/dacha/

Photo illustrations.

Stonehedge



Lake District



Duncansby stacks (Caithness, Scotland)



Beachy Head



Lake Baikal



Lena Pillars



The Curonian Spit



**Valley of Geysers**

****

Elbrus